

2015

# Temple Beth-El

Dzhuliyana Handarova  
handarovadk@vcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108>

 Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

© The Author

---

Downloaded from

<http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108/29>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of World Studies at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in RELS 108 Human Spirituality by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

# Temple Beth-El

by Dzhuliyana Handarova

For the third and final field trip I had to make for this class I decided to attend a service at a synagogue. I've actually had Jewish friends for as long as I can remember, however, I did not realize how extensive their faith was until actually attending a service this past Friday night. Actually, I am still unsure about the entire thing and should've probably taken notes throughout as I am hazy on the details and have forgotten some of the things that went on. I attended a Friday Erev Shabbat Service at the Temple Beth-el on November 20th at 6 p.m. This particular synagogue does something called a Pre-Neg on Friday nights which is basically just a reception filled with food, friends and drinks. I was not aware of this before attending, therefore I showed up when the Pre-Neg was winding down and the official service was about to begin. The leader of the service's name was Michael, but unfortunately I do not remember his last name.

I actually really liked the inside and outside appearances of the Temple Beth-el. The outside was made of bricks and stone – the stone was towards the center of the building but towards the sides there were bricks. It was a pretty big building with about ten to twelve stairs leading to the entrance which was actually a set of three giant double wooden doors. The aesthetic of the building was very grandiose, and it definitely looked the part of being a religious setting of some kind. The inside of the room where the service was held looked like a Christian church,

because it was a typical large room filled with wooden pews facing a raised podium. Over the podium there were three bronze windows decorated with the Star of David, and on the sides of the room there were several beautiful, very colorful stained glass windows. There was a good amount of people present at the service, although I cannot give an exact number. There seemed to be a lot of families present, and some even brought their young children. The average age of the attendees was probably around late thirties, early forties and there did seem to be a higher amount of males than females. Most of the people present were white, however I did notice that there were some African American attendees as well. I and the friend I attended with seemed to be ones of few in our age group (early 20s). I was impressed with how well everyone was dressed; both men and women wore business or business-casual attire, and actually I felt a bit underdressed for the occasion. Since everyone was so well-dressed they all looked like members of the upper-middle or middle class. I was comfortable sitting with everyone, however no one offered me any help probably because I did not attend alone and people probably assumed I knew what was going on. When I walked in I did get quite a bit of looks, but I think that is mainly because people were curious about me as a newcomer and did not actually mean to be rude.

I did a bit of research about Shabbat services in order to more clearly understand what

happened during the service I attended. When my friend and I walked into the Temple Beth-el and took our seats the first things I noticed were the beautiful stained glass windows and the Star of David symbols that decorated the space, and then the fact that people were sitting very, very close to each other (I like my personal space, so this was strange for me). I would say the emotional tone of the service was lighthearted, and everyone seemed very happy to be there and participating. Most of the guests' participation was reserved, because the service included singing specific songs and reciting specific prayers, therefore everyone said the same things. Just like how Bibles are provided during Christian services, worship books were provided for people to use during this Shabbat service as well. The worship books are called siddurs and include traditional prayers in Hebrew as well as English phonetic transliterations for use of those who don't speak Hebrew. During the service, we were told page numbers of the prayers we were going to be reciting so that we could keep up. Most of the service was flipping through the siddur and reciting prayers from it. During my research I discovered that prayers said during Shabbat services are a bit different than those during weekday services. Basically, the Shabbat is a day of rest for worshippers as well as God therefore the prayers are not requests for God, but rather praises for God. I thought this was very interesting and somewhat different than other religions I've read about. After reading from the siddur, there was a short sermon during which the rabbi spoke of traditional Jewish ideas and teachings and the importance of applying them to everyday life. Mainly during the beginning of the service there was singing and music and all of the guests were singing along and everyone just seemed so happy. Although

the service was ritualistic for the most part, I loved seeing how bright and excited people were to be there. Perhaps that varies from synagogue to synagogue but overall it was so refreshing to see people who were genuinely excited about their religion and worshipping their God. I would certainly recommend the Temple Beth-el to someone who was curious about Judaism and wanted to experience it on their own. •

Written Fall 2015. © Dzhuliyana Handarova.